



Aboriginal news from across Turtle Island and beyond
February 18-22, 2013

Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Duncan's resignation welcomed by some First Nations leaders

[Postmedia News](#)

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Natalie Stechyson



Sean Kilpatrick / The Canadian Press Minister

John Duncan's sudden resignation as aboriginal affairs minister likely won't hurt the government's progress on aboriginal issues and may even be a blessing in disguise, some aboriginal leaders said Sunday.

"This may have been a good time to change ministers. I think sometimes a fresh mind and fresh attitude can help. And in this case

it might improve things," said Roger Augustine, the Assembly of First Nations regional chief for New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

"Maybe (acting aboriginal affairs minister James Moore) will get stronger support from the Prime Minister to be able to satisfy and move the First Nations agenda faster and to a better place."

In a move that raised sudden questions about how the Conservative government would make real progress on aboriginal issues, it was revealed late Friday afternoon that Duncan had resigned from cabinet because of an inappropriate "character reference" letter he sent on behalf of a constituent to a tax court judge in 2011.

Duncan will continue to serve as a Conservative MP for the riding of Vancouver Island North, and Heritage Minister James Moore will serve as acting aboriginal

affairs minister until a new minister is named, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said in a written statement late Friday afternoon.

The announcement comes amidst growing political pressure to craft a comprehensive aboriginal affairs policy in the wake of recent protests and demands for action.

But some aboriginal leaders said they weren't too concerned with Duncan's resignation.

Duncan's performance was "disappointing," and all the real control seems to come from the Prime Minister's office anyway, said Michele Audette, the president of the Native Women's Association of Canada.

"I didn't feel like he had real authority. Real power," Audette said.

"Through the years I found it was easy to see the minister when it was time to cut a ribbon, to announce good news or funding, but when it was a crisis situation, such as missing or murdered aboriginal women, he didn't want to meet with me."

The next minister should be more willing to discuss aboriginal challenges and stand up to the Prime Minister, Audette said.

"I just hope that it's going to be a strong person that we feel like will be able sit down and have a real dialogue on how we can improve the quality of life in our community for men and women, elder and youth."

Duncan did try "as hard as he could" during what has been a very difficult time for both aboriginal and government leaders, Augustine said. In the 37 years that Augustine has been involved in politics, he said he's never seen so much division, chaos and mistrust.

"It seems to me that unity has somehow faded away in our own politics, and it's difficult," he said.

"I hope the prime minister gives Mr. Moore strong support and a mandate to try and deal with this ongoing crisis. The expectations will be unbelievable but we have to work together."

At least 3,000 native children died in residential schools: research

[Globe and Mail](#)

Feb. 18 2013, 10:42 AM EST

Colin Perkel



An archival image of students of St. Eugene residential school in Cranbrooke.

At least 3,000 children, including four under the age of 10 found huddled together in frozen embrace, are now known to have died during attendance at Canada's Indian residential schools, according to new unpublished research.

While deaths have long been documented as part of the disgraced residential school system, the findings are the result of the first systematic search of government, school and other records.

"These are actual confirmed numbers," Alex Maass, research manager with the Missing Children Project, told The Canadian Press from Vancouver.

"All of them have primary documentation that indicates that there's been a death, when it occurred, what the circumstances were."

The number could rise further as more documents – especially from government archives – come to light.

The largest single killer, by far, was disease.

For decades starting in about 1910, tuberculosis was a consistent killer – in part because of widespread ignorance over how diseases were spread.

"The schools were a particular breeding ground for (TB)," Maass said. "Dormitories were incubation wards."

The Spanish flu epidemic in 1918-1919 also took a devastating toll on students – and in some cases staff. For example, in one grim three-month period, the disease killed 20 children at a residential school in Spanish, Ont., the records show.

While a statistical analysis has yet to be done, the records examined over the past few years also show children also died of malnutrition or accidents. Schools consistently burned down, killing students and staff. Drownings or exposure were another cause.

In all, about 150,000 first nations children went through the church-run residential school system, which ran from the 1870s until the 1990s. In many cases, native kids were forced to attend under a deliberate federal policy of "civilizing" Aboriginal Peoples.

Many students were physically, mentally and sexually abused. Some committed suicide. Some died fleeing their schools.

One heart-breaking incident that drew rare media attention at the time involved the deaths of four boys – two aged 8 and two aged 9 – in early January 1937.

A Canadian Press report from Vanderhoof, B.C., describes how the four bodies were found frozen together in slush ice on Fraser Lake, barely a kilometre from home.

The “capless and lightly clad” boys had left an Indian school on the south end of the lake “apparently intent on trekking home to the Nautley Reserve,” the article states.

A coroner’s inquest later recommended “excessive corporal discipline” of students be “limited.”

Acting Aboriginal Affairs Minister James Moore, speaking in Vancouver, called the deaths a “horrific circumstance” of the Indian residential school system.

“The residential school fact of Canada’s history is a Canadian tragedy,” Moore said.

The records reveal the number of deaths only fell off dramatically after the 1950s, although some fatalities occurred into the 1970s.

“The question I ask myself is: Would I send my child to a private school where there were even a couple of deaths the previous year without looking at it a little bit more closely?” Maass said.

“One wouldn’t expect any death rates in private residential schools.”

In fact, Maass said, student deaths were so much part of the system, architectural plans for many schools included cemeteries that were laid out in advance of the building.

Maass, who has a background in archeology, said researchers had identified 50 burial sites as part of the project.

About 500 of the victims remain nameless. Documentation of their deaths was contained in Department of Indian Affairs year-end reports based on information from school principals.

The annual death reports were consistently done until 1917, when they abruptly stopped.

“It was obviously a policy not to report them,” Maass said.

In the 1990s, thousands of victims sued the churches that ran the 140 schools and the Canadian government. A \$1.9-billion settlement of the lawsuit in 2007 prompted an apology from Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The research – carried out under the auspices of the commission – has involved combing through more than one million government and other records, including nuns' journal entries.

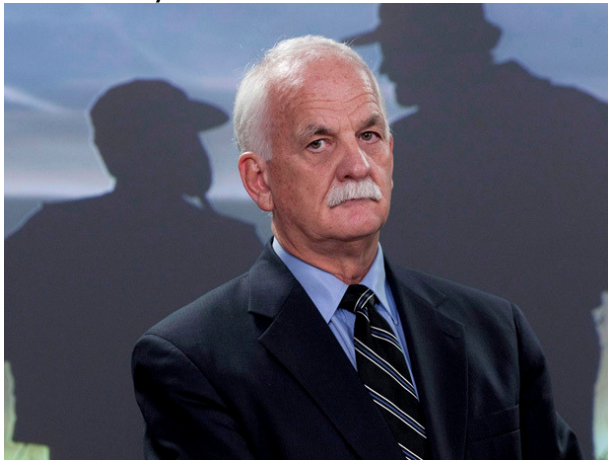
The longer-term goal is to make the information available at national research centre.

Forces brace for cuts to anti-gang squads and aboriginal police as federal fund expires

[National Post](#)

Feb 18, 2013 10:53 AM ET

Nelson Wyatt



Adrian Wyld / The Canadian Press A spokesman for Public

The windup of a federal program that was aimed at putting more cops on the street is threatening anti-gang squads and aboriginal police and could stretch existing police resources across the country, law enforcement officials say.

The Police Officer Recruitment Fund was set up in 2008 with the aim of adding 2,500 more police officers in Canada.

The federal government budgeted \$400 million for the fund as part of its tough-on-crime agenda.

Provinces were given the responsibility of deciding how to spend the money and the two most populous ones received the biggest share, with \$156 million going to Ontario and \$92.3 million to Quebec.

In Quebec, several regional organized-crime squads were set up as well as Project Eclipse, a Montreal city police unit originally targeting street gangs which has since had its mandate widened to focus on organized crime. The force's cyber-crime squad has also been beefed up.

That eclipse squad is one of the units fighting a renewal of Mob violence linked to a power struggle in the Montreal Mafia.

Now its future is in doubt, as the program ends in March.

Montreal police Chief Marc Parent said in an interview the force is trying to keep the funds flowing.

"We're still working on it with the federal minister to make sure we can have a good discussion about the reality we have in Montreal," he said. "We still are positive that we can find a solution about that."

"I'm still optimistic."

In Alberta, \$42.4 million from the fund allowed for the hiring of 83 officers to bolster the Alberta Law Enforcement Response Team, which has targeted gangs, drugs and child exploitation throughout the province since 2006.

However, Michelle Davio, a spokeswoman for the provincial Justice and Solicitor General Department, said funding for the 83 positions will extend to the 2014-15 budget year because of when it began to be allocated.

Opposition Leader Tom Mulcair said the continuation of the Police Officer Recruitment Fund has always been important to his New Democratic Party.

"That program should have been continued and we shouldn't be winding it down," he told a recent news scrum in Montreal.

"There are serious needs. It was a positive role that the government could play in helping those regions of Canada that had the greatest needs fighting gang violence.

Mulcair said the Conservatives "like to snap their suspenders and tell everybody they're a law-and-order government."

"It's an irony to see them scaling back investments on law and order."

The federal government had little to say when asked about the program.

Julie Carmichael, a spokeswoman for Public Safety Minister Vic Toews, responded in an email that reaffirmed the government's commitment to cracking down on gangs.

"We were pleased to make a significant one-time investment in the provinces and territories to help them bolster their police forces and ensure they had the tools to crack down on gun, gang and drug crime," she said in an email.

"We will continue to crack down on gangs and organized crime across the country through tough measures, like our new sentences for gun crimes associated with organized crime, including drive-by shootings."

But Chief Stephen Tanner, who is president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, was less upbeat in an interview and predicted difficult consequences ahead as the funding ends.

He pointed particularly to shortfalls in aboriginal policing, where 11 officers will likely be cut from the 150-strong Nishnawabe-Aski Police Service, one of North America's largest indigenous police departments.

"That's critical for them," said Tanner, who is also chief of the Halton Regional Police Service.

Tanner pointed out the Nishnawabe-Aski force, which is spread out across 34 communities, polices some of the most impoverished small towns in Ontario's far north.

"They may have to withdraw their services from one or two small communities," Tanner said.

"If they have to do that, the Ontario Provincial Police may be forced to go in to police those communities."

That would place further strain on the OPP at a time when it's looking at cutting 125 officers, he said. He added that the force is already under the number required.

Tanner said pulling about \$1 million in police salary from the aboriginal force could actually end up costing \$2 million to \$3 million if the OPP has to take over.

"Fiscally, it doesn't make sense."

When the funding was announced in 2008, the Ontario government said \$78 million would go toward hiring 125 OPP officers, \$58 million would help municipal police hire up to 164 officers and \$20 million would be used to fund 40 new police officers for First Nations police services.

The Ontario government said at the time it would continue to lobby Ottawa to make the funding permanent, saying it still fell short of what was needed.

Tanner said police budgets are already tight in Canada.

He noted that the OPP, Toronto Police Service and a number of other forces won't be sending recruits to the police academy class scheduled for May because of belt-tightening.

Asked later about the effect on aboriginal policing, Carmichael's reply in another email repeated almost word-for-word the government's stand concerning the effects on anti-gang squads.

"Our Government is committed to cracking down on crime across the country," she wrote.

"We were pleased to make a significant one-time investment to provinces and territories to help them bolster their police forces and ensure they had the tools they need to crack down on crime. We have enacted over 30 measures aimed at keeping our streets and communities safe and will continue to take action to strengthen Canada's justice system."

Childhood marked by humiliation and shame: A First Nations elder shares her experiences of residential school with Brookwood students

[Langley Advance](#)

February 19, 2013
Heather Colpitts



*Josette Antone Dandurand has vivid memories of having to ask nuns for toilet paper. Students were given three sheets when they went to the bathroom. **Photograph by:** Heather Colpitts, Langley Advance*

Josette Antone Dandurand held up three sheets of toilet paper.

Having to go to nuns as a small child and ask for toilet paper and receiving much less than needed for the job remains one of the humiliating memories from her nine years in residential school.

And it's one of the personal stories the 70-year-old shared with Brookwood Secondary students during presentations to four classes on Feb. 14. The classes are taking part in Project of Heart, a residential school healing project that started in Alberta and spread across the country.

Her sessions on Valentine's Day included the many heartbreaking events of her childhood.

"I feel that I didn't have a childhood," she said.

Dandurand, whose mother was Kwantlen First Nation and father was Nooksack, was seven when the Indian Agent and the RCMP arrived to take the children. She came from a family of six children, all sent to residential schools.

A priest at the Cooper's Island residential school molested her. It was only in recent times that she won a legal case against him for that abuse.

Soon after arriving, a seven-year-old Josette, who had never seen flush toilets, wet her bed at night. In the morning, she told a nun and she was made, along with any other girls who wet their beds, to parade in front of the rest of the students with the soiled bed linens wrapped around their heads.

If she ever wet her bed after that, she never told a soul.

"I chose to sleep in a wet bed," Dandurand said.

One morning she could not find her hankie for daily inspections.

"I lost my hankie so I was made an example," she said.

The mother superior strapped her in front of the other children. Her older sister's advice: "You don't move your hand and you don't cry. How many times I hear that - you don't cry."

The children were forced to work in the school dairy and orchard but were not allowed to have any of the food which was sold for money, instead they were fed cheap food like potatoes and peas, although the students did get to watch the staff eat well.

Despite not accepting the Catholicism imposed on her as a child, Dandurand said she prays each day because she always wants to express her gratitude for what is good in her life.

Prayer and gratitude are some of the tools she uses in her healing. So is sharing her stories.

"I don't ever want this to happen again," she said.

Residential school students were taught that everything about them was bad or wrong, part of the government's decision to assimilate aboriginal peoples.

"Never be ashamed of who you are," Dandurand told the students.

Her presentation recounted the broad and lasting impacts of residential schools. In her life, it led to two decades of alcoholism before her adult sons asked her to stop.

Within her siblings and their families there have been traumas and scars directly tied to the residential school experiences some six decades ago. One brother was so traumatized by the school dentists that when his teeth failed, he would pull them out himself, until he had none left.

There have been suicides, drug and alcohol abuse, and an array of relationship problems.

"We never talked about the things that happened to us in residential school," she said.

Dandurand did what she had to do to survive those nine years and found solice in learning. After graduating she went into the Canadian Air Force, where the fighter control operator met her husband of 44 years and lived in various spots around Canada and abroad.

"Air force life was a piece of cake for me compared to residential school," Dandurand said.

Through Dandurand's presentation, Grade 8 students Lauren Chevrier, Angel Dick and Lee Strutinski got to put a face on a what could have just been a paragraph in a textbook.

"We can think about it more and imagine what it was like," Chevrier said.

"It's more personalized," Strutinski said.

She noted that her mom's generation didn't learn about residential schools when they were young.

Strutinski said she read a book by a survivor of the residential school so the subject was not new to her, like it was for Dick and Chevrier but all were disheartened to learn that this was a recent part of Canadian history.

The students taking part in Project of Heart drew on small wooden tiles in memory of the children who've died because of residential schools. Dick and Strutinski made their tiles into a dream-catcher to capture bad dreams created by the trauma the children went through, while Chevrier's design with a heart was her desire to combat the heartbreaking history she learned.

Project of Heart tiles will be put on permanent display in Vancouver.

Teacher Larry Goldsack said he invites speakers such as Dandurand because the students gain a deeper understanding of how history and issues impact people.

He took part in Project of Heart when he was at another school last year but didn't get to complete the several phases.

"This whole Project of Heart is something that's long overdue," Goldsack said.

He said since he introduced it for three of his Brookwood classes, other teachers have joined the campaign.

The end result is that these young people are talking about issues raised by the history of this country, and First Nations elders find healing in talking about their experiences and having those acknowledged by the broader society.

hcolpitts@langleyadvance.com

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